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ABSTRACT

Activities to stimulate interest in and knowledge about economics among seventh graders are described in this paper. Major activities include: (1) initiating a round of student team interviews with parents and other working adults, (2) presenting a case-study simulation whereby a panel of community experts evaluates student decision-making and then gives their choice, (3) an activity in which student-prepared dishes represent a major agricultural product from each state, and (4) having students draw conclusions from their interviews. Instructions for recruiting adults for the interview and case study activities, and for organizing events are provided. Possible pitfalls are noted for each activity. (IS)

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ECONOMICS ALIVE

by Sue Foley

1985

In the real world, inability to use economic understanding is like being able to subtract on paper but unable to make correct change. To many of my students, economics was truly a "dismal science." Abstract concepts, detached from experience, led to frustration and bewilderment. In order to make such terms as "capital goods" and "productivity" concrete for them, I created ECONOMICS ALIVE.

As my seventh graders interviewed parents, relatives, neighbors, farmers, and business people, economic terms began to take on real meaning and real learning occurred. And as the students' knowledge increased, so did the positive responses of the adult participants. One of the most satisfying by-products is hearing citizens (who haven't responded to a school bell in years) say: "Your students are really learning!" And some of my Michael Jackson devotees whisper words of pride about their parents . . . the same students who only a month ago paused and sighed when asked to describe what their parents do for a living.

This article outlines how to plan ECONOMICS ALIVE.

Sue Foley teaches seventh grade social studies at Wilson Middle School in the Get It Together alternative program for underachieving students in Rockford, Illinois. In 1984 she was recognized as Rockford Teacher of the Year.

The intent is to minimize organizational headaches and to facilitate adaptation for teachers.

Overview of Major Activities

Activity 1: Initiate a round of student team interviews with parents and other working adults.

Activity 2: Present a case-study simulation whereby a blue ribbon panel of community experts evaluate student decision-making and then give their choice.

Activity 3: "Sample the States" in which students consume a major agricultural product representing each state from student-prepared dishes.

Activity 4: Debrief students by having them draw conclusions from their interviews.

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Activity 1. Interviews

(Time: variable; 15 minutes per interview works well.)

WHAT	HOW
— Recruit a pool of adults willing to answer questions about their jobs.	— Present the idea at an Open House or by letter. Stress the kinds of questions that students will ask, and urge their cooperation.
	— Seek representatives from labor, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, governmental agencies. Use district volunteer bureau if available.
	— Invite teachers/administrators/board members to explain their jobs. Bonus: encourage a member of the media to attend.
	— Ask parents to recommend others they know who have unusual jobs.
	— Review your Christmas card list and neighbors as good prospects.
— Ask each student to choose an occupation.	— Schedule one of three student choices.
— Create a master schedule allowing 15 minutes per interview by a student pair.	— Organize the schedule (see example in box). Assign each student a number.
— Schedule the interviewing in a large area, i.e. cafeteria, to allow guests to display products and to avoid distractions.	— Practice interviews through videotaping or homework assignments to question parents.
— Formulate interview questions (see sample questions in box). Send copies to participants along with confirmations of the date and time of their interview. Encourage interviewees to wear their workclothes, bring company brochures, worksheets, tools.	— Plan seating of guests alphabetically. Use tagboard placecards, coded by session.
— Issue a press release.	

DAY OF THE EVENT

— Distribute name tags and evaluation form at the sign-in area. Offer to send a letter to interviewees' employer/supervisor, indicating their participation.

— Adhere to a strict time schedule.

— Prepare in advance for adults who do not show up.

— Assign two student ushers to help locate interviewees' table.

— Collect all student interviews for later use in debriefing.

PITFALLS

— Recruitment is the most critical of all tasks; without a sufficient pool of adults, the activity will fail. Pour your energy and enthusiasm into this item. Reassure listeners that no personal questions are allowed, i.e., "How much money do you make?"

— The day before the interviews, complete each of these items on the interview sheets: name of the guest, time of interview, occupation, place of work.

— Explain the students' schedule thoroughly. Underscore the importance of polite behavior.

Sample Schedule for Interview Sessions (Activity 1)

Participant/ Company	Period 1 7:50-8:05	Period 2 8:05-8:20	Period 3 8:25-8:40
James Slife, Sundstrand Corp.	Smelzer 11 Smith 12	Teeter 15 White 20	Edwards 7 Bowerman 1
William Beu, Attorney	Carlson 3 North 8	McGuire 9 Byerly 2	French 4 Morr 5

Sample Interview Questions (Activity 1)

Student name _____ Time of interview _____

Guest Name _____ Where guest works _____

Job _____ Job category: goods _____ services _____

GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR ALL GUESTS

1. Please explain your job.
2. Describe your schedule.
3. How does a person become successful in a job like yours?
4. How is your job performance judged?
5. What have been your biggest successes?
6. Name 3 capital goods (tools, machines, equipment) you use most often.
7. How will your job change by the year 2000?
8. Have there been layoffs at your place of work? Why/why not?
9. Has your job changed in the past 3 years? Yes _____ No _____
10. Does international competition affect your job? Yes _____ No _____
11. Is there a union at your place of work? Yes _____ No _____
12. After you worked in the position you are now in, was any more training/education required? Encouraged? Yes _____ No _____
13. Have you or your company received any special awards or recognition? Yes _____ No _____ If yes, explain.
14. Name one way the government is involved in your job.

GOODS (MANUFACTURING, AGRICULTURE)

15. What 3 products are produced?
16. Is your product sold outside the state? Yes _____ No _____
17. Is your product sold in more than 20 states? Yes _____ No _____
18. Is your product sold internationally? Yes _____ No _____
19. Do interest rates affect your business? Yes _____ No _____
20. Has the price of your products gone up in the past year? Yes _____ No _____ If yes, why?
21. Which product is most in demand now? Why?
22. Does the price of energy have any effect on the price of your product? Yes _____ No _____ Please explain.
23. Has any new equipment been added to your place of work? Yes _____ No _____
24. Are there any examples you can think of that show increased productivity or quality control? Yes _____ No _____ Explain.
25. Are there any materials used in your product that are imported from another country? Yes _____ No _____
26. Is there a lot of competition in this area for your product? Yes _____ No _____ If so, why?

SERVICES (MEDICAL, EDUCATIONAL, FOOD, CONSTRUCTION)

27. Has the number of people you serve increased? Yes _____ No _____ Explain.
28. What is the most satisfying part of your job?
29. Does the state of the economy affect the service you offer? Yes _____ No _____ Explain.
30. Does experience make a difference in your job? Yes _____ No _____
31. What education is needed for your job?
32. What is the most difficult/frustrating part of your work?
33. What is the most interesting part of your job?
34. What are the risks or hazards in your occupation?
35. Please explain an example of the most challenging situation in your work.
36. If a customer/client is unhappy with your service, what can he/she do?
37. Is there a lot of competition with others in your field? Yes _____ No _____
38. Has the price of your service: ____ gone up, ____ gone down, or ____ stayed the same in the past three years? Explain.
39. Does the unemployment rate in this city affect your service? Yes _____ No _____

Activity 2. Simulation Case Study with Expert Panel
(Time: approximately one hour.)

WHAT	HOW
— Choose a business case study in which students make decisions. Practice using group decision-making.	— Use *"Trade-offs" Guide* (1978), Agency for Instructional Technology, Box A, Bloomington, IN 47402. Paul Tedesco, *Teaching with Case Studies* (1974), is an excellent resource.
— Select a panel of community experts. Explain that their task is to observe and comment on student economic reasoning. After this exercise, have each expert give his/her choice.	— Find representatives from labor, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, banking, mayor's development office, local business, professors from college/university.
— Send out confirmation letter to panelists, including case study as well as a short observation guide.	— Mimeo enough case study copies for student groups as well (see below). — Procure panelist credentials for press release.

DAY OF THE EVENT

— Prearrange students into groups of 5; designate a student leader.
— Introduce panelists. Outline the panel's observation role. Read aloud the case study.
— Break into groups to discuss the case study. Give case study to each group with a grid sheet.
— Meet in the general session to report each group's consensus. Hear each critique and his/her solution to the case study.
— Elicit panelists' predictions on jobs in the future; comment on foreign competition. Describe ways students can prepare for the future.

PITFALLS

— Avoid blood! Provide students plenty of practice in economic group decision-making.
— Make a concerted effort to include at least one woman and one minority on the panel.

Activity 3. Sample the States
(Time: approximately 1 hour, depending on the number of students.)

WHAT	HOW
— Send home a note explaining the mandatory report on an agricultural product. Have the students choose three products (e.g. milk, eggs, pork) they are most interested in and find a recipe that features each product as the major ingredient.	— Make a master list of each state's products (see box). Select one recipe per student. Ensure wide variety and geographic representation by filling in each state on a small U.S.A. map as product recipes are selected.
— Schedule the use of a large room. Invite parents, staff, board members.	— Stress that each student must have a card with: name, state, region, hot/cold dish, recipe.
— Find several parent volunteers to handle food.	— Specify when/how the food is to arrive.

DAY OF THE EVENT

— Plan volunteer time to warm food. Show a videotape from the PBS series "Enterprise" on economic case studies.
— Explain the Scavenger Recall Hunt by challenging students to remember and match recipe/food product with the correct state (see Debriefing below).
— Post a large map of the U.S.A. and fill in the name of the state and the student's product and recipe.
— Arrange student reports on a display table.

PITFALLS

— Decide ahead the procedures for students who cannot afford to bring food. An extra report or assistance with cleanup are examples.

— Emphasize to parents and students that students are responsible for the major part of the cooking.

— Arrange food by regions (see box). Minimize confusion; insist on a student card.

Activity 4. Debriefing

(Time: one period, or as homework.)

WHAT	HOW
— Tally results to yes/no questions in interviews.	— Prepare sheet based on questions.
— Challenge students to draw conclusions and generalizations.	— Give the most surprising thing you learned. List some capital goods. Predict what will happen in the future. Choose the person with the toughest job, why you think he/she is successful, etc.
— Hold the Scavenger Recall game.	— List all the states; match the chief product with the student dish.

"Sample the States" list by Region (Activity 3)

NEW ENGLAND REGION
Connecticut—oysters, lobsters, clams, flounder
Maine—blueberries, sardines, lobsters
Massachusetts—cranberries, cod
New Hampshire—dairy products
Rhode Island—poultry
Vermont—maple syrup

MID-ATLANTIC REGION
Delaware—poultry, snap beans
Maryland—clams, beans
New Jersey—tomatoes, spinach
New York—grapes, cabbage, duck
Pennsylvania—mushrooms, pretzels

APPALACHIAN REGION
Kentucky—pork, corn
North Carolina—sweet potatoes, turkeys
Tennessee—beef
Virginia—turkey, ham
West Virginia—apples

SOUTHEAST REGION
Alabama—pecans
Arkansas—chicken, rice
Florida—oranges, watermelon, celery, grapefruit, honey
Georgia—peanuts, chicken, eggs
Louisiana—rice, yams, okra
Mississippi—sugar, okra
South Carolina—peaches

GREAT LAKES REGION
Illinois—corn
Indiana—turkey, tomatoes, eggs
Michigan—cherries, cucumbers, pickles
Ohio—tomatoes
Wisconsin—green peas, cranberries, deer, snap beans

HEARTLAND REGION
Iowa—pork
Kansas—wheat
Minnesota—butter, milk, turkey
Missouri—rye
Nebraska—beef
North Dakota—wheat, sunflower seeds, barley
South Dakota—rye

MOUNTAIN REGION
Colorado—sugar beets
Idaho—potatoes, sugar beets
Montana—beef, sugar beets
Nevada—beef
Utah—apricots, lamb, turkey
Wyoming—potatoes

SOUTHWEST REGION
Arizona—lemons, lettuce
New Mexico—onions
Oklahoma—beef
Texas—beef, rice, watermelon

PACIFIC COAST
Alaska—salmon, halibut, herring, cod, shrimp
California—olives, dates, prunes, raisins, almonds, broccoli
Hawaii—pineapples, sugar
Oregon—cherries, walnuts, pears
Washington—raspberries, apples